# CHAPTER 6
# OTHER MISSIONS

*In addition to conducting reconnaissance, surveillance, and establishing screens, the reconnaissance platoon may be required to assist the battalion in occupying assembly areas, and in conducting passage of lines, linkups, and relief in place missions. This chapter discusses the role of the reconnaissance platoon in those missions and how they track enemy forces.*

## 6-1. ASSEMBLY AREAS

A battalion occupies an assembly area (AA) for security while preparing for future operations. Occupation of an AA is normally SOP. The requirements of the reconnaissance platoon vary according to the SOP. The platoon is normally tasked to locate, clear, and assist in the orderly occupation of an AA. The platoon precedes the battalion's quartering party. It conducts an area/zone reconnaissance to locate the AA to determine if it is suitable for occupation, and most important, to determine if the enemy is in the area. (Appendix D discusses the actions of the platoon while in the AA. For more information, see FM 7-20.)

## 6-2. PASSAGE OF LINES

A passage of lines is an operation in which one element passes through the positions of another. For example, elements of a covering force withdraw through the forward edge of the MBA, or an exploiting force moves through the elements of a force that initially conducted an attack. A passage of lines is either forward or rearward, depending on the direction of travel.

a. The actions of the reconnaissance platoon vary according to whether the passage is forward or reward, and whether the battalion is the stationary or passing element. The battalion SOP addresses the "standardized actions of elements assisting in the passing or passage of lines. (For more information, see FM 7-20.)

b. The reconnaissance platoon can be expected to conduct liaison, provide guides, reconnoiter routes, and establish screens. The battalion commander or S3 determines the exact requirement. Once the platoon leader knows the requirement, he assigns specific missions to the squads. The platoon leader should locate in a position where he can monitor and control the actions of the platoon. Each squad must know the sequence of events, the times they will occur, and the exact location of the passage. The platoon leader ensures the squads know what they are required to do

following the passage. The squad can either link up with the platoon leader or execute the follow-on mission.

## 6-3. LINKUP

Linkups are part of most light infantry operations and normally occur in enemy-controlled areas. Linkups are conducted to consolidate forces or to make coordination. Higher headquarters tasks the reconnaissance platoon to conduct linkup with friendly forces. Also, the platoon leader may require the squads to link up in order to consolidate the platoon. Successful linkups depend upon detailed planning and coordination.

a. **Site Selection.** When battalion directs two units to linkup, it designates a primary and an alternate linkup point. The platoon leader designates primary and alternate linkup points when conducting internal linkup. The site should be easy to find at night, must have cover and concealment, be off natural lines of drift, and must offer access and escape routes.

b. **Recognition Signals.** Far and near signals are required to keep friendly forces from firing on each other. The radio can be used as a far recognition signal, and code word(s) should be used to keep transmissions short. Code words may be developed for indicating the position of the force from the site, occupation of the site, or security of the site. Visual and oral recognition signals are planned and coordinated before departing friendly lines. The types of signals used are sign, countersign, and linkup site.

(1) ***Signs, couutersigns.*** These can be a challenge and password or a number combination. An even number should not be used for a near signal. A sign or countersign could also bean exchange of signals using filtered flashlights, chemical lights, infrared lights, or VS-17 panels for far recognition signals.

(2) ***Linkup sites.*** These signals are placed at the exact location of the linkup point. Examples are stones placed in a prearranged pattern, markings on trees, and arrangement of wood and tree limbs. The first force arriving at the linkup site places the sign and then assumes a covered and concealed position to observe it. The next force to arrive at the site identifies the signal and initiates the far recognition signal.

c. **Execution.** Linkups may occur between two forces traveling on different routes, or when one force already forward has established a linkup site and awaits the arrival of another force. Linkups are normally executed by squads or teams from a larger force. The following discussion portrays a squad executing the linkup of two platoons.

(1) ***Actions at the linkup site with both platoons moving*** (Figure 6-1). In a linkup, the execution begins once the platoons move toward, the linkup site. If necessary, the platoons can use codewords to report their location.

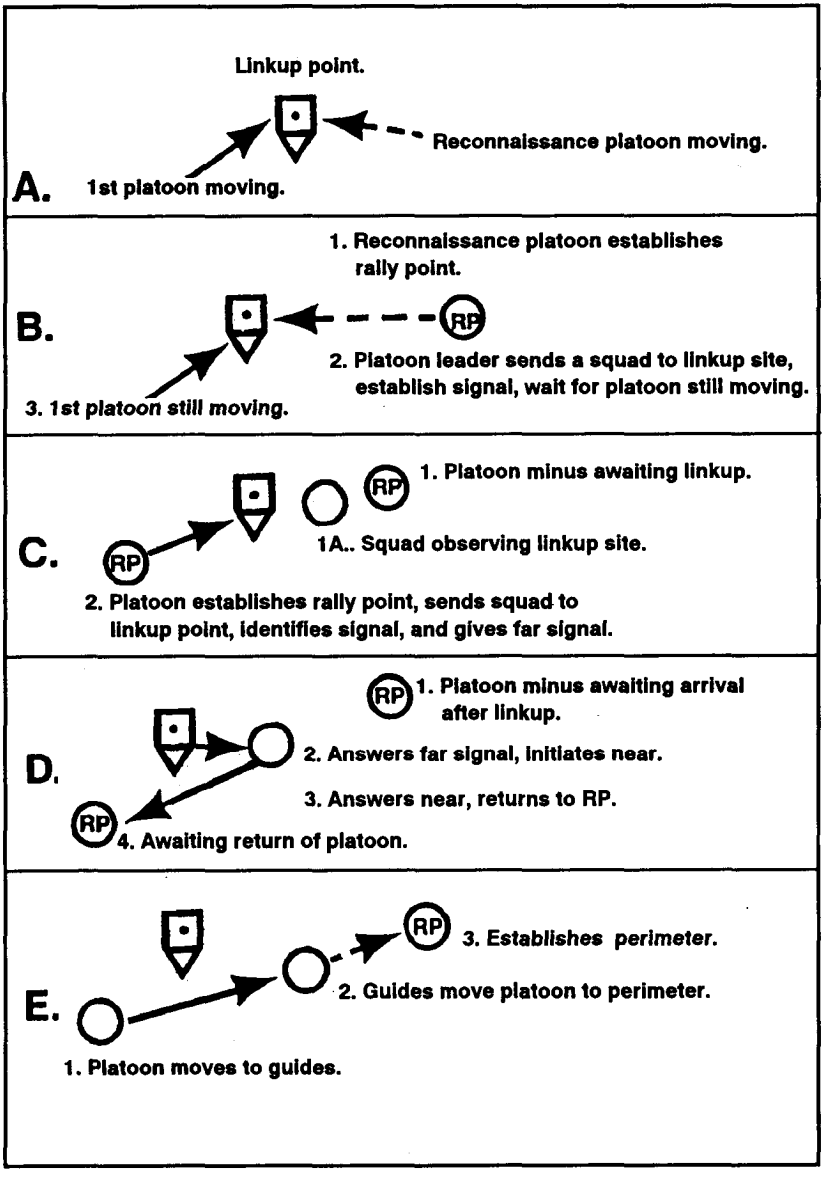


**Figure 6-1. Linkup sequence of events.**

Phase lines and checkpoints are used to control movement. The platoon that establishes the linkup site occupies a rally point close to the linkup site. A squad moves to pinpoint the linkup site and secures it. This squad marks the linkup site using the previously coordinated recognition signal and positions itself to observe the site. The moving platoon also establishes a rally point close to the linkup site and then sends a squad forward to pinpoint the linkup site. The squad should spot the recognition signal and then initiate the far recognition signal, which is answered by the squad observing the linkup site. The squad at the linkup site then moves toward the squad answering the signal and exchanges near recognition signals. The stationary squad initiates the signal. Once these squads coordinate, the squad arriving at the linkup site returns to the rally point and guides the platoon back to the linkup site. The squad establishing the linkup then guides the platoon to the rally point. The platoon leader then integrates the platoon into the perimeter.

(2) ***Actions at the linkup with one platoon moving.*** The leaders of both platoons coordinate with their respective higher headquarters for location of linkup, call signs, frequencies, codes words, far and near signals, and control measures. The stationary platoon establishes a rally point and sends a squad to secure and mark the linkup point. The moving platoon moves toward the linkup point and establishes a rally point when close enough to do so. (The actions of the stationary and moving platoon hereafter remain the same as shown in Figure 6-1.)

## 6-4. RELIEF IN PLACE

A relief in place is an operation in which one force replaces another. A relief-in-place operation is planned, coordinated, and controlled at battalion. The battalion commander or S3 determines the role of the reconnaissance platoon during a relief. The platoon normally provides guides, conducts initial coordination, and relieves the outgoing force's reconnaissance platoon. The platoon assists with the relief of other elements before they relieve the outgoing force's reconnaissance platoon. This is done for security reasons. A battalion conducting a relief is always vulnerable to an enemy attack. The reconnaissance platoon is normally closest to the enemy. If the enemy is in a position to observe the outgoing force's reconnaissance platoon being relieved, the enemy may seize the opportunity and attack. (For more information, see FM 7-20.)

## 6-5. GUIDES

A reconnaissance platoon often provides guides as part of a reconnaissance, passage of lines, and relief in place, or during conduct of a linkup. Guides aid in the positioning of forces for follow-on missions. At a minimum, a guide element should be composed of two soldiers. The remaining soldiers estab-

lish a rally point or, if performing reconnaissance of an objective, maintain observation. A guide element must know the route from the linkup point to its designated area, especially during limited visibility. The route should be marked with any available material. Once linkup has occurred, guides lead the element into position and continue to perform the mission as stated in the OPORD (see paragraph 6-3).

## 6-6. TRACKING

The reconnaissance platoon can be given the mission to follow the trail of a specific enemy force. When operating in a low-intensity conflict environment, the reconnaissance platoon has a greater likelihood of receiving a tracking mission. A tracker must have patience and move slowly, quietly, and steadily while observing and interpreting available indicators. He must avoid using reckless speed that may cause him to overlook important signs, lose the trail completely, or blunder into an enemy force. Attention to detail, common sense, logic, and knowledge of the environment and enemy habits allow soldiers to obtain valuable information from signs in the area of operation.

a. **Organization.** When the reconnaissance platoon receives the mission to conduct a tracking patrol, it assigns the task of tracking to only one squad. The remaining squads provide security or act as a reserve if contact is made. (Figure 6-2 shows the typical organization of a tracking squad.)

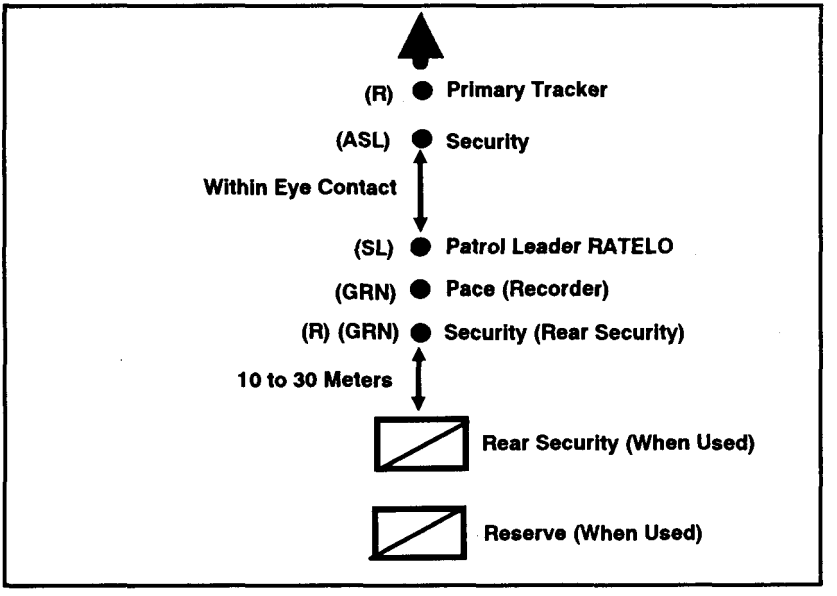


**Figure 6-2. Tracking organization and formation.**

(1) ***Squad leader.*** The squad leader carries the radio and is the primary navigator. He has overall responsibility for accomplishing the mission, organizing the force, and setting each soldier's load.

(2) ***Primary tracker.*** The primary tracker's job is to follow the main trail left by the tracked group; he has no other duties. The primary tracker focuses on following the main trail.

(3) ***Security.*** The security man observes to the front and flanks of the trail and provides security for the primary tracker who concentrates on the trail. Normally, this is the assistant squad leader.

(4) ***Rear security.*** **The** rear security man provides security for the rear. He looks back along the trail at irregular intervals to keep from being ambushed from behind. If the squad makes enemy contact to the front or flank, the rear security man is in the best position to support the men in contact. The rear security man also records the traveled azimuths to assist in navigation.

b. **Concepts.** Any indicator that the tracker discovers can be defined by one or more of the following concepts:

- Displacement.
- Stains.
- Weather.
- Litter.
- Camouflage.
- Immediate-use intelligence.

(1) ***Displacement.*** Displacement (Figure 6-3) takes place when anything is moved from its original position. A well-defined footprint in soft, moist ground is a good example of displacement. The shoe or foot of the individual who left the print displaced the soil by compression, thus leaving an indent in the ground. By studying this indicator, the tracker can determine several important facts. The print left by worn footwear or by a barefooted person may indicate lack of proper equipment.

(2) ***Stains.*** A stain occurs when any substance from one organism or article is smeared or deposited on something else. The best example of staining is blood from a profusely bleeding wound. Bloodstains are often in the form of spatters or drops. Blood indicators are not always on the ground but may also besmeared on the leaves or twigs of trees and bushes.

(a) Staining can also occur when muddy footgear is dragged over grass, stones, and shrubs. Thus, staining and displacement combine to indicate movement and direction. Crushed leaves may stain rocky ground that is too hard to leave footprints. Roots, stones, and vines may be stained where leaves or berries are crushed by moving feet.

(b) In some instances, it may be hard to determine the difference between staining and displacement since both terms can be applied to some indicators. For example, water that has been muddied may indicate recent movement mud that has been displaced also stains the water; stones in streams may be stained by mud from footwear; algae can be displaced from stones in streams and can stain other stones or the bank.

(c) Water that collects in footprints in swampy ground is muddy if the tracks are recent. With time, however, the mud settles and the water clears. The tracker can use this information to indicate time. Normally, the mud clears in about one hour. Clearing time, of course, varies with the terrain.

(3) ***Weather.*** Weather can either aid or hinder the tracker. Wind, snow, rain, or sunlight may completely erase indicators, thus hindering the tracker.

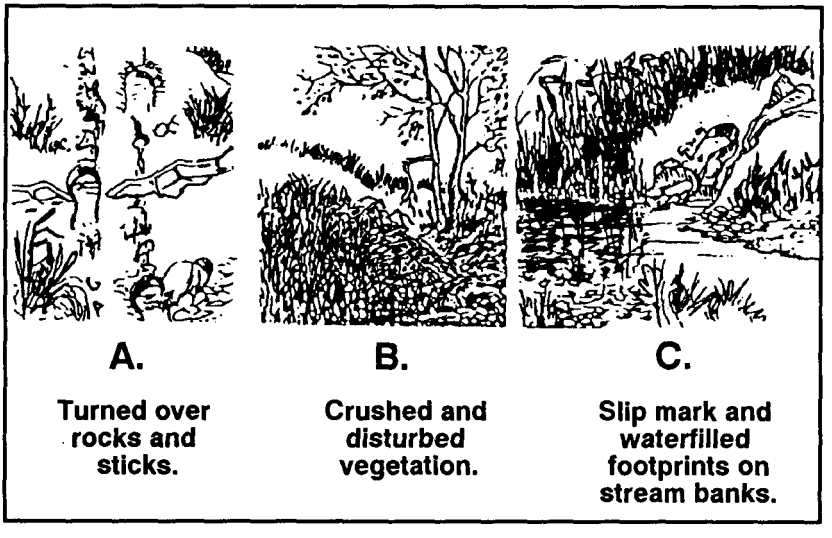


**Figure 6-3. Displacements.**

(a) By studying the effects of weather on indicators, the tracker can determine the age of the indicator. For example, when bloodstains are fresh, they are bright red. Air and sunlight change the color of blood first to a deep ruby red then to a dark brown crust when the moisture evaporates. Scuff marks on trees or bushes darken with time; sap oozes and then hardens when it makes contact with the air.

(b) Footprints are greatly affected by weather (Figure 6-4, page 6-8). By carefully studying this weather process, the tracker can determine the approximate age of the footprint. If particles are just beginning to fall

into the print, the tracker should become a stalker. If the edges of the print are dried and crusty, the prints are probably at least an hour old. This varies with the terrain and should be considered as a guide only.

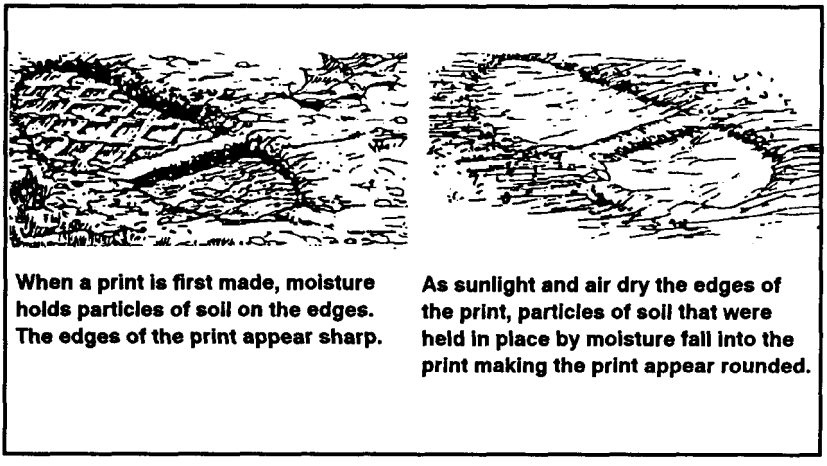


**Figure 6-4. Weather effects on footprints.**

(4) ***Litter.*** A poorly trained or poorly disciplined force moving over a piece of terrain is likely to leave a clear trail of litter. Gum or candy wrappers, ration cans, cigarette butts, remains of fires, or even piles of human feces are signs of recent movement. However, the tracker must consider weather when estimating the age of such litter. Rain flattens or washes litter away and turns paper into pulp. Ration cans exposed to weather rust first at the exposed edge where it is opened and then moves toward the center. Again, the tracker must use his experience to properly determine the age of litter. The last rain or strong wind can be the basis for a time frame.

(5) ***Camouflage.*** Camouflage applies to tracking when the party being followed employs techniques to confuse the tracker or slow him down. Walking backward to leave confusing prints, brushing out trails, and moving over rocky ground or through streams are examples of techniques that may be employed to confuse the tracker. By studying signs, a careful, observant tracker can determine if an attempt is being made to confuse him. If the party attempts to throw off the tracker by walking backward, the footprints are deepened at the toe and soil is scuffed or dragged in the direction of movement. By following carefully, the tracker normally finds a turnaround point.

(6) ***Immediate-use intelligence.*** As the tracker moves, he constantly asks himself questions. As he finds indicators that answer those questions, he begins to forma picture of the enemy in his mind.

(a) *Interpreting.* The tracker must avoid reporting his interpretations as facts. He should report that he has seen indications of certain things instead of stating to the commander that these things actually exist. The commander may have more information to help him estimate the enemy he is facing.

(b) *Reporting.* Immediate-use intelligence is information concerning the enemy that can be put to use immediately to gain surprise, to keep the enemy off balance, or to keep him from escaping the area entirely. A tracker can obtain information that, when combined with information from other sources, indicates enemy plans. Tracking is one of the best sources of immediate-use intelligence. Indicators may be so fresh that the tracker becomes a stalker, or they can provide information that helps the commander plan a successful operation.

c. **Footprints.** Footprints may indicate direction and rate of movement, number of persons in the moving party, whether heavy loads are being carried, and whether the enemy realizes that they are being followed (Figure 6-5).

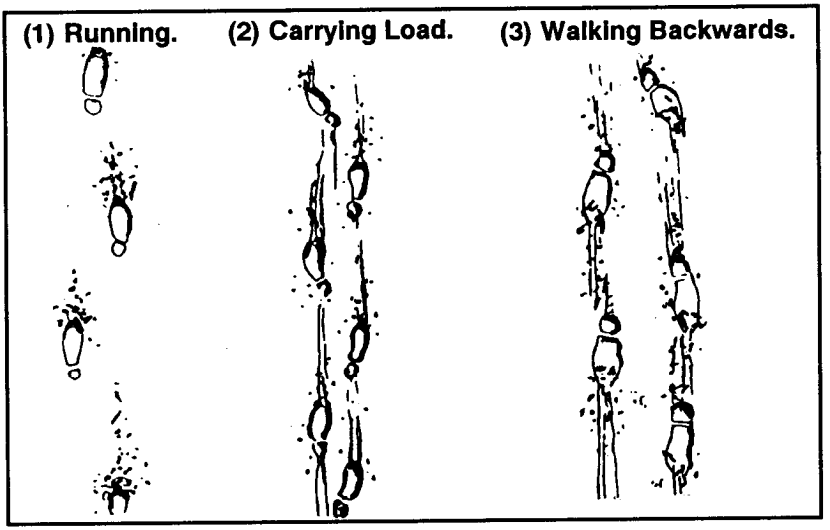


**Figure 6-5. Different types of footprints.**

(1) ***Running.*** If footprints are deep and the pace is long, rapid movement is apparent. Extremely long strides and deep prints with toe prints deeper than heel prints indicate running.

(2) ***Carrying load.*** Prints that are deep, short, and widely spaced with signs of scuffing or shuffling indicate that the person who left the print is carrying a heavy load.

(3) ***Walking backwards.*** If the party members realize they are being followed, they may try to hide their tracks. Persons walking backward have a short, irregular stride. The prints have an unnaturally deep toe. Soil is displaced in the direction of movement.

d. **Key Prints.** Since the last man in a file normally leaves the clearest footprints, his should be the key set of prints. The tracker should cut a stick to match the length of the key prints and notch it to indicate the width at the widest part of the sole. He should study the angle of the key prints to the direction of march. The tracker should also look for an identifying mark or feature on the prints, such as a worn or frayed part of footwear, to help him identify the key prints. If the trail becomes vague or erased, or merges with another, the tracker can use his stick-measuring devices and, with close study, can identify the key prints. This helps the tracker to stay on the trail. A technique used to count the total number of individuals being tracked is the box method. There are two methods the tracker can use to employ the box method:

(1) The first and most accurate method is to use the stride as a unit of measure when key prints can be determined. The tracker uses the set of key prints and the edges of the road or trail to box in an area to analyze (A, Figure 6-6). This method is accurate under the right conditions for counting up to 18 persons.

(a) Determine the key print. In this case, the key print is the print left by the lug sole boot. This boot made the last print on the trail, and it is the easiest print to recognize.

(b) Draw a line across the heel of one of the key prints.

(c) Move forward to the opposite key print and draw a line across the instep. Add the extra one-half print to determine if a person is making an abnormally long stride.

(d) Use the edges of the road or trail as the sides of the box, and the drawn lines as the front and back. Any person walking normally would have stepped in the box at least onetime. Count each print or partial print in the box.

(e) Remember to count the key print only once.

(2) The second method a tracker can use to employ the box method is the **36-inch box.** It is used where there are no key prints distinguishable. However, this system is not as accurate as the stride measurement (B, Figure 6-6).

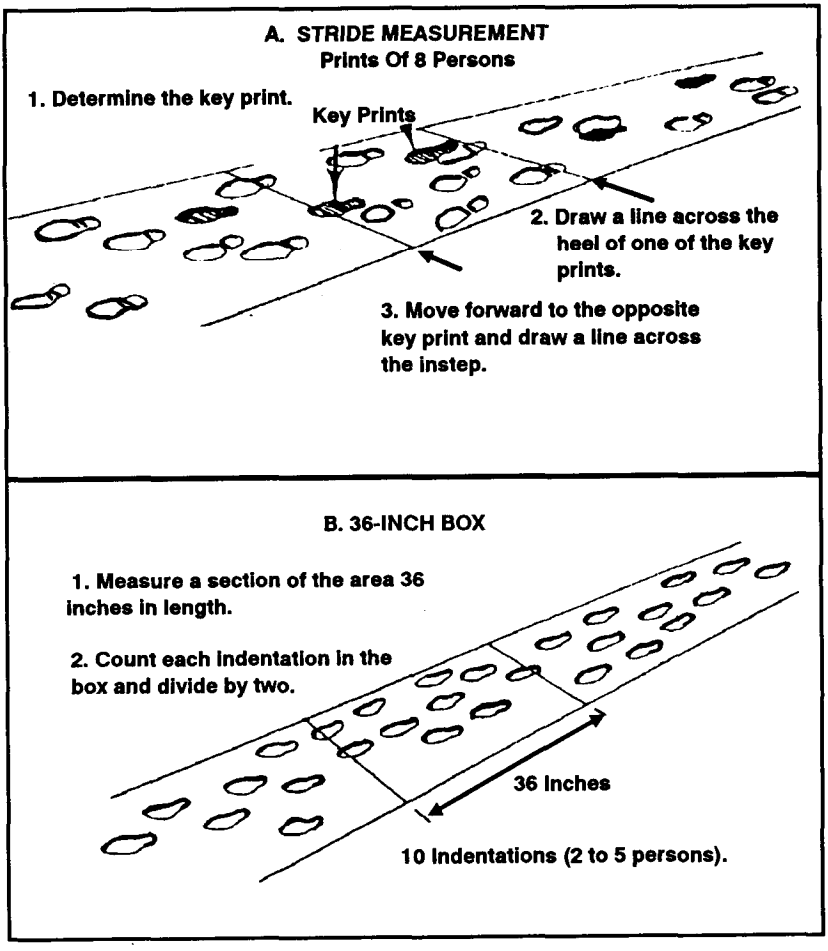


**Figure 6-6. Stride and 36-inch box method.**

(a) Use the 36-inch box method when no key print is available. Use the edges of the road or trail as the sides of the box.

(b) Measure across a section of the area 36 inches in length. The M16 rifle is 39 inches long and may be used as a measuring device.

(c) Count each indentation in the box and divide by two. This gives a close estimate of the number of persons who made the prints.

e. **Other Signs of Displacement.** Footprints are only one example of displacement. Anything that has been moved from its original position by a moving person is an example of displacement.

(1) Foliage, moss, vines, sticks, or rocks that are scuffed or snagged from their original place form good indicators. Vines may be dragged,

dew droplets may be displaced from leaves or stones, and sticks may be turned over to indicate a different color underneath. Grass or other vegetation may be bent or broken in the direction of movement.

(2) Bits of clothing, threads, or dirt from boots can be displaced from a person's uniform and left on thorns, on snags, or on the ground. The tracker should inspect all areas for bits of clothing or other matter ripped from the uniform of the person being tracked.

(3) An enemy entering or exiting a stream creates slide marks, footprints, or scuff bark off roots or sticks. There are many examples and signs of displacement; the tracker needs to carefully analyze those signs that indicate movement.